

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: SOVIET LEADERSHIP CHANGES

REF: STATE 55614

1. WE GENERALLY CONCUR IN INR'S EXCELLENT PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT (REFTEL) WHICH WAS TIMELY AND MOST HELPFUL. HOWEVER, ON SEVERAL POINTS WE HAVE SOME PROBLEMS AND WOULD HOPE TO CLEAR UP WHAT MAY WELL BE SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES.

2. IT DID NOT SEEM TO US THAT BREZHNEV AND OTHERS STRESSED THE WISDOM OF COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN ORDER TO SIGNAL THAT "SHIFTING ALLIANCES AND MAJORITIES STILL DETERMINED POLICY" (PARAGRAPH 10 REFTEL)." WE WOULD AGREE THAT BREZHNEV CONTINUES TO GOVERN BY CONSENSUS RATHER THAN FIAT. THE COMPARATIVELY FEW DIRECT REFERENCES TO COLLECTIVITY AT THE CONGRESS BY SPEAKERS OTHER THAN BREZHNEV SEEMED TO US TO BE ONLY FILMY COUNTERWEIGHTS TO THE PLETHORA OF REFERENCES TO BREZHNEV'S PREEMINENT ROLE IN THE PARTY.

3. BREZHNEV'S OWN RELATIVE STRESS ON THE POLITBURO AND SECRETARIAT, WHICH WAS ECHOED BY OTHER SPEAKERS, STRUCK US MORE AS PART OF THE IMAGE OF THE "MODEST", "BUSINESSLIKE", "LENINIST STYLE OF PARTY WORK" THAT BREZHNEV AND OTHERS APPARENTLY WISHED TO PROJECT, THAN AS EMPHASIS ON CORPORATE DECISION-MAKING PER SE.

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RM WE ARE ALSO PUZZLED AT THE ASSERTION THAT SHCHERBITSKIY'S STAYING IN THE UKRAINE SHOULD BE INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF BREZHNEV'S INABILITY TO MOVE UP A PROTEGE (PARAGRAPH 10 REFTEL). IT SEEMS TO US MORE LIKELY THAT BREZHNEV WANTED A STRONG ALLY AT THE HELM OF THE UKRAINIAN CP, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE SECOND SECRETARY THERE HAD JUST BEEN APPOINTED AND THE UKRAINIAN CENTRAL COMMITTEE SHAKEN UP. MORE IMPORTANT, THERE IS NO TOP-LEVEL VACANCY AT THE CENTER THAT WE CAN SEE SUITABLE FOR SHCHERBITSKIY TO FILL. IN ANY EVENT, WE HAD NO DIRECT INDICATION THAT BREZHNEV WISHED TO SHIFT SHCHERBITSKIY TO MOSCOW, AND WOULD APPRECIATE KNOWING IF THE DEPARTMENT HAS INFORMATION THAT SUCH A MOVE WAS IN THE WORKS.

5. DEVELOPMENTS IN ADDITION TO THE ONES MENTIONED IN REFTEL WOULD SEEM TO LEND WEIGHT TO INR'S TENTATIVE JUDGMENT THAT SOVIET DOMESTIC POLICY MAY BE SOMEWHAT MORE RESTRICTIVE AND ITS FOREIGN POLICY LESS ACCOMMODATING IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONGRESS. IN ADDITION TO ZIMYANIN'S PROMOTION TO THE SECRETARIAT, A NUMBER OF OTHERS IN THE PRESS AND PROPAGANDA FIELD SUPERVISED BY SUSLOV WERE ELEVATED TO FULL OR CANDIDATE CC MEMBERSHIP (SEPTTEL). IN ADDITION, RECENT ARTICLES LAUDING ANDREY ZHDANOV AND HIS POSTWAR POLICIES, ALSO REPORTED SEPARATELY, SEEM IN LINE WITH SUSLOV'S WELL-KNOWN VIEWS. WHAT PRACTICAL EFFECTS THIS WILL HAVE REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

6. IN ANY CASE, WE AGREE ENTIRELY THAT MORE TRADITIONALISM SEEMS TO BE IN THE OFFING, AND THAT THE CC, POLITBURO AND SECRETARIAT CHANGES DO NOT PROMISE INNOVATIONS IN BASIC POLICY.
STOESSEL

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